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FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1063  
INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC PRIORITY

UNCLAS JERUSALEM 000567

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/PASCUAL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PTER KWBG IS PGOV

SUBJECT: HAMAS SECURITY FORAY INTO AL-AZHAR UNIVERSITY IN GAZA; TRUSTEES CALL FOR SIT-IN PROTESTS, CLASS SUSPENSION

¶1. (SBU) Summary. University contacts report that Hamas Executive Force gunmen and pro-Hamas students forcibly entered of al-Azhar University in Gaza City on March 31, occupying the campus and assaulting several students and staff before leaving later the same day. University administrators had attempted to prevent a large rally to commemorate Ahmad Yasin's 2004 death. University trustees called for sit-in protests and suspension of all classes, and most classes were canceled March 31-April 1. End summary.

Hamas Gunmen Enter University,  
Beat Students and Staff

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¶2. (SBU) According to university contacts and local press, Hamas Executive Force gunmen forcibly entered and occupied buildings at al-Azhar University in Gaza City early on March 31 before departing by the afternoon of the same day. (Note: While al-Azhar has student groups from all factions, the university and its administration have historically been informally associated with Fatah. End note). University officials had attempted to prevent a large rally to commemorate the death of Hamas spiritual leader Ahmad Yasin, as part of a general ban on political demonstrations on campus. Pro-Hamas students called on Hamas security men to forcibly allow the rally, and there are press reports that several students, professors and staff were beaten by the gunmen as the Executive Force occupied the campus.

¶3. (U) Al-Azhar Vice President for Administration Jabr al-Da'ur told local press that Hamas gunmen and students hung Hamas flags and posters of Ahmad Yasin and other Hamas leaders all over the campus. Hamas security officials claimed to local press that the Executive Force had acted properly and needed to enter the university to restore order amidst fighting between students.

Trustees Condemn Invasion, Call for  
Cancellation of Classes, Sit-In Protests

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¶4. (SBU) University trustees voted April 1 to condemn the Executive Force move and called for a sit-in protest and temporary cancellation of classes. Most classes were canceled on March 31 and April 1; university contacts say the administration is currently deliberating whether to resume classes April 2 or delay re-opening for a week. Separately, on April 1 in Gaza City about 500 Palestinians peacefully protested Hamas' actions at of the University.

WALLES